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the end. Progress will be hindered if these systems are allowed to cramp and fetter us. If preconceived notions of what *should be* are suffered to blind our eyes to what really *is*, our palæontology would itself become a fossil, as dead as the trilobites of palæozoic days. Our subdivision of the geological column into Hamilton, Chemung, Catskill, &c., or even into Cambrian, Silurian and Devonian, &c., is simply a device to assist memory and classification, not to represent actual and separate creations. And with every new discovery we must expect to see the lines and planes that separate these imaginary groups and systems become less and less clear until they are fused into a whole whose parts shade into one another like the colors of the rainbow. Nature is larger than our systems, and our knowledge of fossil nature must some day outgrow our artificial "canons of palæontology." But in all such cases nature cannot be warped to our "canons," our "canons" on the contrary must bend to the facts of nature.

The writer cannot conclude without, superfluous as it may seem, adding a word to express his sense of the value of the labors of Professor James Hall in American palæontology. He has laid broad and deep foundations for future workers. How numerous or industrious soever they may be, they must always acknowledge that they are building over his beginnings. That some errors should creep into work so great and varied is to be expected. But compared with the grand whole, they are insignificant. In pointing out and correcting a few of these errors in the foregoing pages, nothing is farther from the writer's wish than to seem to depreciate Professor Hall's labors. The facts and misstatements here criticised are mainly details—mere spots on the face of the sun—but for that reason the more worthy of attention and scrutiny.

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## ANCIENT ROCK INSCRIPTIONS ON THE LAKE OF THE WOODS.

BY A. C. LAWSON, M.A.

WHILE prosecuting a geological survey of the Lake of the Woods last summer, I observed upon the rocks, at two places not far distant from each other on the shores of the lake, ancient inscriptions which may be of some interest to those who are engaged in gathering up and weaving together the scattered

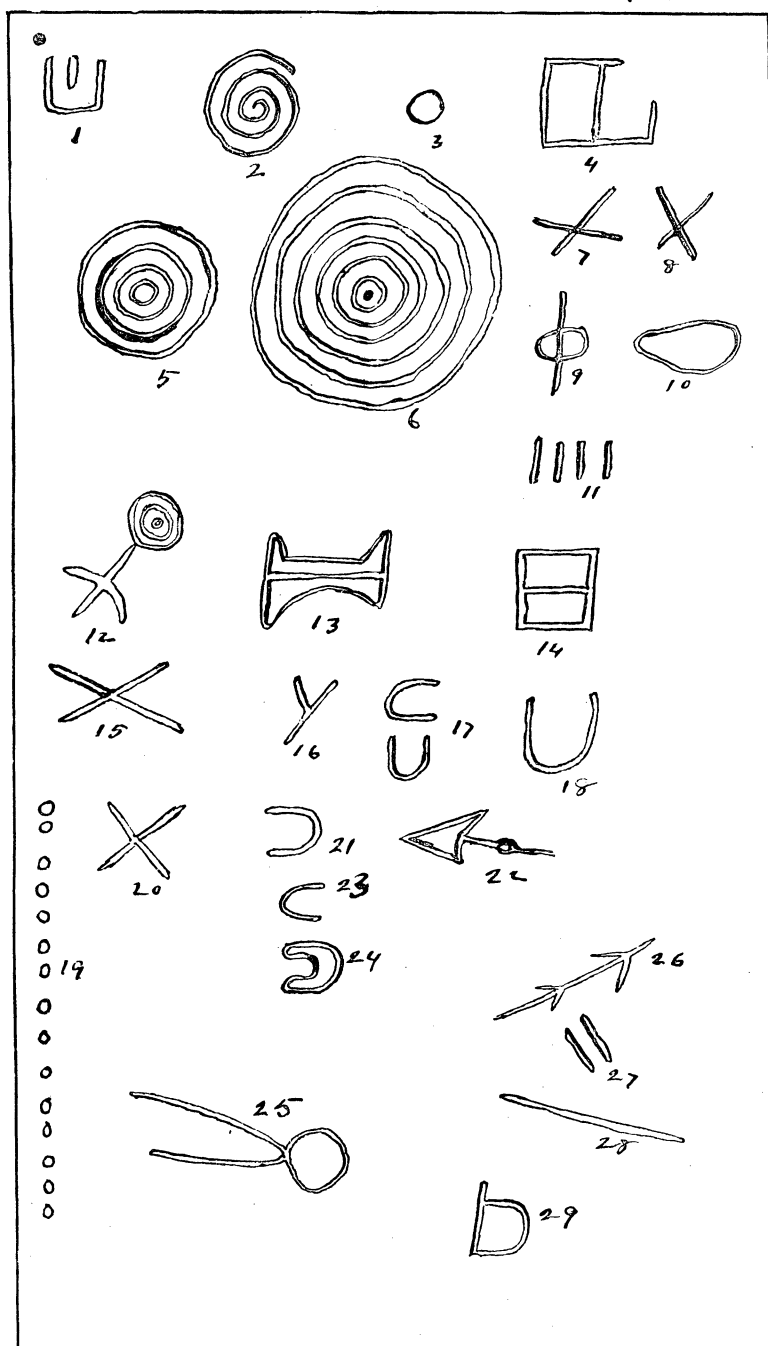
threads of evidence, which in the web display the checkered life-history of the aboriginal peoples of the American continent. I am induced to publish this note on the subject at present, rather than wait for further opportunities of collecting additional material, because of the striking resemblance which some of the characters of these inscriptions bear to those of certain Brazilian rock inscriptions figured by Mr. John C. Branner in his interesting paper in the December number of the *AMERICAN NATURALIST*.

The Lake of the Woods is divided about its middle into two parts, a northern and a southern, by a large peninsula extending from the neck of land at Turtle Portage on the east side of the lake to within a very few miles of the west shore. On the north side of this peninsula, *i. e.*, on the south shore of the northern half of the lake, about mid-way between the east and west shores, occurs one of the two sets of hieroglyphic markings to which I refer. The more typical examples of these are figured in Plate XIX. Lying off shore at a distance of a quarter to half a mile, and making with it a long sheltered channel, is a chain of islands trending east-and-west. On the south side of one of these islands, less than a mile to the west of the first locality, is to be seen the other set of inscriptions. The first set occurs on the top of a low, glaciated, projecting point of rock which presents the characters of an ordinary *roche moutonnée*. The rock is a very soft, foliated, green, chloritic schist into which the characters are more or less deeply carved. The top of the rounded point is only a few feet above the high water mark of the lake, whose waters rise and fall in different seasons through a range of ten feet. The antiquity of the inscriptions is at once forced upon the observer upon a careful comparison of their weathering with that of the glacial grooves and striæ, which are very distinctly seen upon the same rock surface. Both the ice grooves and carved inscriptions are, so far as the eye can judge, identical in extent of weathering, though there was doubtless a considerable lapse of time between the disappearance of the glaciers and the date of the carving. The ice grooves are not merely local scratches but part of the regular striation which characterizes the whole region. Both the striæ and inscriptions present a marked contrast to some recent letters which passing traders or travelers, attracted by the novelty of the inscriptions, have cut into the rock, much in the same spirit as that in which my Christianized Indian canoe-man pro-

ceeded to carve his initials in the rock with my hammer the moment we landed. The weathered and rough character of the carving afforded no clue as to the tool used. In size the characters varied from about three to twelve inches. There was no indication of ochre having been rubbed into the carving. The characters figured in Plate XIX were scattered over the rock surface in all directions and in greater numbers than are represented; and although the typical ones are gathered together on one sheet, that arrangement by no means shows their relative positions. The chief advantage to be derived by archæologists from an acquaintance with such inscriptions is the tracing out the similarity or identity of the individual characters with those of inscriptions found in other parts of the continent. There is little hope of any coherent meaning or narrative ever being derived from such isolated groups of characters.

The similarity of some of the characters now figured to those described by Mr. Branner from the boulders of Alagôas is a striking and suggestive one. For example, No. 2, Plate XIX, is identical with the left-hand figure of Mr. Branner's *h*, even as to the number of whorls and their direction. No. 25 is almost identical with *a* and *b* of Mr. Branner's plate. The horse-shoe or part-circle shape is distinctly common to both, as may be seen by comparing *X* and *d* of the Brazilian inscriptions with 17, 18, 21, 23, 24 and perhaps 29 of those from the Lake of the Woods. Nos. 7, 8, 15, 20 may be compared with Mr. Branner's asterisk as simpler forms on the same principle. The circle is also common to both sets. Nos. 1, 4, and 14 are similar in character to the 3d form from the top of Mr. Branner's *X*. No. 10 has nearly the same shape as the 3d on the top row of the same group. No. 12 is not unlike Mr. Branner's *c* and No. 19 is on the same principle as the chain of small circles of his *f*. But there is no need of straining the comparison. The coincidence appears to be too strong to be purely accidental, although considering the remoteness of the two regions in question, much more abundant material for comparison would be required before inferences, even of the most general sort, could be drawn.

The island on which were found the other inscriptions to which I have alluded, is one of the many steep rocky islands known among the Indians as *Ka-ka-ki-wa-bic min-nis*, or Crow-rock island. The rock is a hard greenstone, not easily cut, and the



inscriptions (Fig. 1) are not cut into the rock but are painted with ochre, which is much faded in places. The surface upon which the characters are inscribed forms an overhanging wall protected from the rain, part of which has fallen down, cutting off the inscription sharply at 6. The characters are represented in their relative positions as they appear on the rock surface,

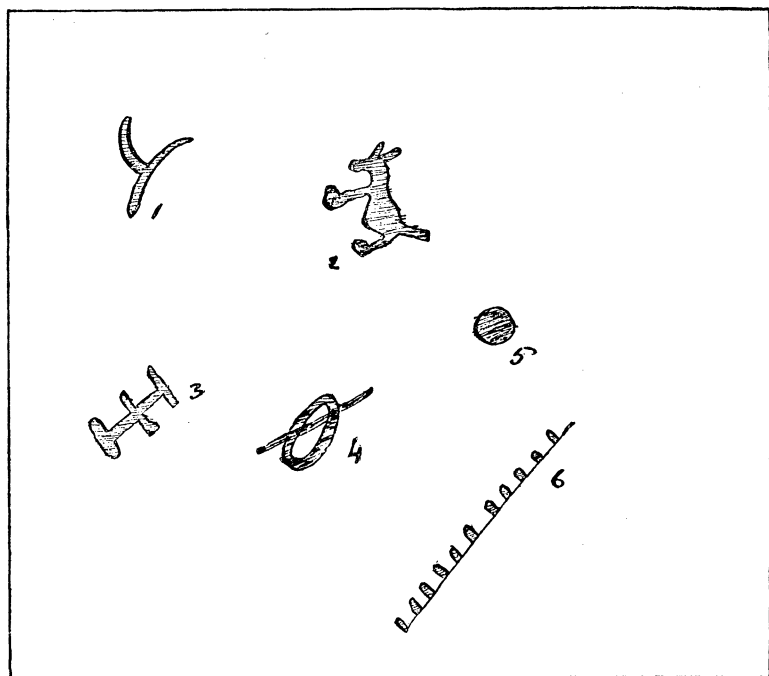


FIG. 1.—Indian Inscriptions.

reduced about ten times. Two of the forms, viz., 1 and 4, have a sufficiently strong resemblance to 16 and 9 respectively of Plate XIX, although one is in ochre and the other carved into the rock, to lead to the belief that the two inscriptions are closely related in authorship. The Indians of the present day have no traditions about these inscriptions beyond the supposition that they must have been made by the "old people" long ago.